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Preservice teachers' implicit attitudes toward racial minority students: Evidence from three implicit measures

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ABSTRACT

Implicit attitudes can be activated by the mere presence of the attitude object. They are assumed to guide behavior in demanding situations, including the educational context. Implicit attitudes toward racial minority students could be important in contributing to the disadvantages those students experience in school. This study employed three different measures to investigate implicit attitudes toward racial minority students among preservice teachers. The IAT and the AMP showed more negative implicit attitudes toward racial minority than toward racial majority students; the affective priming task revealed that implicit attitudes toward racial majority students were positive, while those toward racial minority students were neutral. Results are discussed in their implications for preservice teachers' judgments and behaviors.

Introduction

Educational research has consistently shown that racial minority students experience disadvantages in educational systems. Compared to racial majority students, they perform poorly in school (e.g., Dee, 2005; Haycock, 2001; Lee, 2002) and thus are overrepresented in lower level and vocational courses (Ansalone, 2001; Lucas, 2001; Oakes, 2005), in lower school tracks (Caro, Lenkeit, Lehmann, & Schwippert, 2009). They are also recommended less frequently for the higher level tracks, even when academic performance is controlled for (Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, Klapproth, & Böhmer, 2013).

In Germany, racial minority students mainly stem from Turkey (Destatis, 2012). Students with Turkish roots are overrepresented on the lowest school track (Caro et al., 2009) and underrepresented on the highest track (Kristen & Granato, 2007). They more frequently fail to complete school (Coneus, Gernandt, & Saam, 2009) and consequently, they have jobs with lower prestige and lower employment rates than their German peers (Euwals, Dagevos, Gijsberts, & Roodenburg, 2007). In the German school system, attending the highest school track and leaving this track with a qualification for university entrance is of high importance for the future professional career of students.

Considering that teachers are the main decision makers when it comes to grading or tracking (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004), the abovementioned disadvantages might not only stem from racial minority students' lower academic achievement, but also from biases in teachers' judgments. In educational research, stereotypes and teacher expectations are discussed as factors influencing teachers' judgments (e.g., Jussim & Harber, 2005; Südkamp, Kaiser, & Möller, 2012). To this extent, teachers expect racial minority students to show lower academic achievement than racial majority students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Teacher judgments have been shown to be affected by race (McCombs & Gay, 1988; Parks & Kennedy, 2007), indicating a possible negative bias against the racial background of a student; this was true for both experienced and preservice teachers with limited teaching experience. In this vein, negative teacher and preservice teacher biases might reflect prejudice (Devine, 1989), defined as negative attitudes toward the members of a social group (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996). Attitudes reflect the positive or negative evaluation associated with an object or a social group (Fazio, 2007) and attitudes might affect how people are perceived and judged (Olson & Fazio, 2009; Sanbonmatsu & Fazio, 1990). Thus, it seems of high importance to investigate the nature of attitudes toward racial minority students, as those attitudes might be reflected in judgments. Hence, the aim of this study was to

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investigate preservice teachers' attitudes toward racial minority students.

Theoretical background

On a theoretical level, implicit and explicit attitudes are distinct constructs resulting from two different mental processes (Gawronski, Strack, & Bodenhausen, 2009). Explicit attitudes are defined as conscious evaluations of the attitude object which result from reflected and controlled processes (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). In contrast, implicit attitudes are defined as automatic evaluations of the attitude object which result from automatic processes (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Implicit attitudes can be activated by the presence of the attitude object (Fazio, 2001). Thus, the different kinds of attitudes resulting from different mental processes are prevalent in different situations. These processes are specified in dual process models on how attitudes guide behaviors (e.g., Fazio, 1990; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Strack & Deutsch, 2004; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). In this study, we draw on the Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants (MODE) model (Fazio, 1990; Olson & Fazio, 2009). Explicit attitudes are assumed to guide perception, judgments, and behavior in situations where people have enough time, cognitive resources, and motivation to reflect on their attitudes, make conscious judgments, and control their behavior (Fazio, 1990; Olson & Fazio, 2009). In situations with high cognitive demands, implicit attitudes should be prevalent and guide perception, judgments, and behavior. Although these two processes are not mutually exclusive and both explicit as well as implicit attitudes might come into play (Olson & Fazio, 2009), the automatic character of implicit attitudes means that implicit attitudes are dominant in most situations, as they are automatically activated by the mere presence of the attitude object (Fazio, 2001) and people are often not aware of this influence (Asendorpf, Banse, & Mücke, 2002).

Implicit and explicit attitudes are measured using quite distinct methods. Explicit attitudes measures rely on the assumption that explicit attitudes are conscious evaluations and that people can report their explicit attitudes when asked to evaluate an object. Thus, explicit attitudes are assessed using questionnaires and rely on self-report measures. However, when it comes to socially sensitive issues, people are often reluctant to report their "real" explicit attitudes (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995), and explicit attitudes measures might reflect social norms (Fazio et al., 1995; Karpinski & Hilton, 2001) and social desirability (De Houwer, 2006) rather than explicit attitudes. Hence, implicit attitudes measures attempt to reduce the social desirability bias (De Houwer, 2006). Since implicit attitudes are defined as being automatic, implicit attitudes measures tap into automaticity (De Houwer, 2006; Moors & De Houwer, 2006). The definition of automatic processes involves unconsciousness, non-intention, unawareness, and efficiency. Therefore, implicit measures usually share at least one of these properties (Hofmann, Gschwendner, Nosek, & Schmitt, 2005). As a whole, implicit attitudes measures seem to be a valuable tool in assessing socially sensitive issues such as attitudes toward racial minority students.

Implicit attitudes may also play a pivotal role for preservice teachers' judgments and behaviors, since working as a teacher is stressful (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001), often requiring action under time pressure (Santavirta, Solovieva, & Theorell, 2007). Under such conditions, implicit attitudes may be particularly influential. Given that preservice teachers' judgments can have a great impact on students' future educational and professional careers, preservice teachers' implicit attitudes toward racial minority students are vital when they enter the classroom.

In the last years, many different implicit measures have been developed (see Glock & Kovacs, 2013, for an overview of most but not all measures). Since previous research on implicit attitudes has shown that the nature of implicit attitudes differs as a function of the stimuli used (Robinson, Meier, Zetocha, & McCaul, 2005) and the methods applied (Sherman, Rose, Koch, Presson, & Chassin, 2003), inconsistent results regarding implicit attitudes toward racial minority students could stem from those measurement methods. Although research employing the same three implicit measures has not found substantial differences in revealed implicit attitudes, it is nevertheless plausible that each measure assesses unique aspects of implicit attitudes (Payne, Govorun, & Arbuckle, 2008). Moreover, each implicit measure requires different categorization tasks (Olson & Fazio, 2003) and participants' performance might not only reflect automatic attitudes, but also particular features of the stimuli or of the categories employed in the measure (De Houwer, Geldof, De Bruycker, & De Bruycher, 2005; De Houwer, 2003). Hence, employing multiple measures of implicit attitudes is highly recommended in implicit attitudes research. Therefore, in order to rule out that measurement methods affect the results to a greater extent than implicit attitudes do, we employed three different implicit attitudes measures using the same stimulus materials.

Research question

The aim of this study was the investigation of the nature of implicit attitudes toward racial minority students. Educational research on implicit attitudes toward racial minority students is particularly sparse. One study found ambivalent implicit attitudes toward racial minority students among preservice teachers, while the attitudes toward racial majority students were positive (Glock, Kneer, & Kovacs, 2013). Another study found slightly more negative implicit attitudes toward racial minority students than toward racial majority students (Van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010).

In order to derive hypotheses regarding the nature of implicit attitudes toward racial minority students, we drew on the MODE model, suggesting that implicit attitudes affect judgments. Considering the fact that preservice and inservice teachers judged racial minority students less favorably than racial majority students even when the students showed equal academic achievement (Glock, Krolak-Schwerdt, et al., 2013; Glock & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2013; Parks & Kennedy, 2007), and the relationship between implicit attitudes and judgment specified in the MODE-model, we expected implicit attitudes toward racial minority students to be more negative than implicit attitudes toward racial majority students. This effect should be shown by all implicit attitudes measures.

First, we used the affect misattribution procedure AMP (Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005; Payne, McClernon, & Dobbins, 2007). Unlike other implicit attitude measures such as the Implicit Association Test IAT (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), this task does not rely on reaction times but rather on ratings of stimuli as pleasant or unpleasant (Payne et al., 2007). It has been shown to be unaffected by social pressure in measuring implicit racial attitudes (Payne, Burkley, & Stokes, 2008; Payne et al., 2005). This method is based on the assumption that the attitude object activates a corresponding evaluation, which subsequently results in a judgment about a Chinese pictograph that reflects this evaluation. If the attitude object is positively evaluated, subsequently presented Chinese pictographs will be evaluated as more pleasant than when the attitude object elicits a negative evaluation.

Second, we used the IAT, which is currently one of the most prominent measures (Schnabel, Asendorpf, & Greenwald, 2008).